

Utility sale would help raze blighted homes

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Standing in front of a half-burned abandoned house, Mayor Greg Ballard today talked about the need to fix ailing infrastructure and offered the sale of water and sewer utilities as the way to get money to do it.

He touted the deal, which would put the utilities under control of nonprofit Citizens Energy Group, a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix decades-old problems."

About \$450 million from the deal -- money that would come from sewer rates -- would be used for roads, streets, bridges, sidewalks and other long-term projects. Ballard has pledged the money will not go toward operating costs.

Today, his focus was on tackling about 2,000 abandoned houses across the city. He said the city will seek an administrator to oversee the demolition of unsafe buildings so work on them could start if the deal is approved.

The City-County Council is expected to vote on a final proposal next month, but tonight a council committee will consider whether to recommend moving forward with negotiations. The Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission also would have to sign off on the proposal.

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20100511/NEWS05/5110399/Utility-sale-would-help-raze-blighted-homes>